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ABSTRACT

Noting that China has undergone tremendous social change in its three decades under the Marxist-Leninist-Maoist ideology, this paper contends that such change has triggered tension that upsets the equilibrium of the entire social system. The paper uses Talcott Parson's cybernetic communication model to explain the societal level changes that have occurred in contemporary China, and then applies this model to the process of mass communication in that country and traces the manner in which higher order value orientations are transmitted into more specific lower order attitudes and regulations in the general spheres of pattern maintenance and tension management. The cybernetic model proposed in the paper implies that the changing roles of mass media will repeat themselves every time there is a major change in the Chinese social system and that China will continue to draw upon some of its formerly established social values. The paper suggests that it takes time for any country to accept a new culture and that mass communication plays several important parts in the ultimate acceptance of that culture. (Author/FL)

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Social Change and Mass Media: Towards A Cybernetic Communication Model for National Development in China

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Introduction

Daniel Lerner (1963) mentioned that one major function of mass communication in development is to raise the aspirations of individuals and aggregrate such aspirations at the societal level. He argued that when an individual's desire for a better life is aroused by the mass media, than the individual will strive for it as a consequence of such awareness. The desire for a better life by the people at large will eventually mobilize mass participation in social activities that provide the impetus for development. Lerner's model implicitly applies to a society where the people can within limits make their own choices economically and politically. It didn't take into account how mass media might affect individuals in a strictly-controlled nation that self-consciously limits individuals' economic and political choices.

In the case of China, the society is under the strict control of the central government run by the Chinese Communist Party. However, the notion proposed by Lerner that mass participation can lead to development may to some extent still be valid in the case of China, but for a different reason. In a controlled society, such as China, the mass media can be used as a tool for achieving the development goals set by the authority. This, indeed, is what the Chinese central government has chosen to do. Furthermore, the central government has identified two major functions for the mass media. On one hand, the mass media

provide a means for the institutionalization of the current Marxist-Leninist-Maoist ideology against the traditional feudalistic Confucian teachings and the evil and corrupted capitalistic traditions of the west. On the other hand, the mass media provide an information channel from the Chinese Communist Party to the masses (Koo, 1980c). These two basic functions virtually defined the role and meaning of mass communication in China's development program.

To better understand how mass communication function in the transmission of higher-order value orientations based on the Marxist-Leninist-Maoist ideology to the more tangible and specific lower-order behavior in China, a Parsonian cybernetic communication model is proposed. This model also utilizes Parsons' A-G-I-L scheme and particularly the pattern-maintenance, tension-management scheme.

A Functional Perspective

Parsons postulated that societies can be viewed analytically as containing four different systems: the cultural system, the social system, the personality system and the behavioral organism as a system.[1] Of these four systems, the first two can be merged to form a larger socio-cultural system which mainly constitutes the higher-order ideology. The latter two systems can, on the other hand, be merged to form another personality-behavioral system of lower-order overt attitude/behavior changes. These

two new systems are essential and central to the analysis of mass communication function in China's social setting.

In defining the cultural system, Parsons maintained that:[2]

> It is quite clear that the high elaboration of human action system is not possible without relatively stable symbolic systems where meaning is not predominantly contingent on highly particularized situation....It is such a shared symbolic system which functions in interaction which will here be called a cultural tradition.

In other words, Parsons defined the cultural system as:[3]

> Patterned or ordered systems of symbols which are components of the personalities of individual actors and institutionalized patterns of social system. [Cultural systems include].... belief systems, systems of expressive symbols, and systems of value-orientation.

"Meaning" or "symbolic system," particularly those shared meanings, are thus the major components in a cultural system. Such symbolic systems include languages, national values, religious beliefs and the like. These symbolic systems help to maintain the integration of a social system through socialization processes as well as through personality internalization.

Chu (1977) has suggested that one of the major roadblocks to national development in China is the holding to traditional social values, particularly components of the ancient Confucian values and the denial of a new revolutionary social value. It is only through the willingness of the masses to remove or convert such conservatism that a traditional society like China can move

forward in its development. In the past decades, the Chinese government has tried to accomplish a cultural change so as to inject new energy into the development process. Under such conditions, socialization to new values became a major task. And mass communication became a major vehicle for transimtting those new values to the masses. This was particularly true in the years prior to and after the Cultural Revolution (1967) when the Chinese educational system was confronted with various problems such as the closing down of campuses and the purge of teaching and administrative faculties.

The development of mass media technology in China is decades behind that of the affluent western industrial nations. Nevertheless, in the fifties and sixties communication system composed of loud speakers mounted on tree-top served the nation well in its attempt to generate acceptable new social values. The proliferation of the electronic media, particularly televisions, in the late seventies supplemented the loud speakers. There are indications within China today that the entire nation is beginning to talk in the same language and that the topic they are discussing is development under the Chinese socialist ideology. In other words, Marxism-Leninism-Maoism has become the new socio-cultural ideology that helps China to reach the ultimate goal of communism. Mass communication, on the other hand, has thus become the indispensible tool for the transmission of such new socio-cultural ideology to the lay masses.

The formulation of this new socio-cultural ideology cannot be completely removed from the past and present social system of China. A social system, as defined by Parsons, consists of actors who interact with each other through the shared symbolic systems.[4]

> A social system consists in a plurality of individual actors interacting with each other in a situation, which has at least a physical or environmental aspect, who are motivated in terms of tendency to the "optimization of gratification" and whose relation to their situation, including each other, is defined and mediated in terms of a system of culturally structured and shared symbols.

In China, the social system is composed of almost one billion individual actors. The system of culturally structured and shared symbols of the past is gradually fading away and is being replaced by a new system. Family and kinship as the foundation of the Chinese society are being replaced by the development of cooperatives and communes that are intended to serve the purpose of a big family. The elimination of feudalistic concepts through various mass campaigns has moved the Chinese society one step closer to the Marxist-Leninist-Maoist ideology. A major architect of these efforts was Mao Zedong. Mao Zedong and his cadres found considerable resistance to change effors in certain areas of the nation. The nation was still under the strong influence of Confucian teachings and other feudalistic ideologies that had ruled China for the past three thousand years. However, Mao Zedong and

his cadres identified dissenting individuals or groups or individuals or groups who made mistakes in their revolutionary work and criticized them in local and national newspaper and the radio broadcasts.

The determination of the Chinese government and that of Mao to plant the new socialist values in the changing social system can be explained by Mao Zedong's statement:[5]

> [The masses] educate and remould themselves....shake off the influence of domestic and foreign reactionaries..... rid themselves of the bad habits and ideas acquired in the old society, not allow themselves to be led by the reactionaries and continue to advance - to advance towards a socialist and communist society.

Throughout the past three decades, the Chinese social system has been attempting to cultivate a new system that is both acceptable to the masses, and in the best interest of the Chinese Communist Party.

Parsons, in his extrapolation of the theory of social action, has defined personality as:[6]

> A system....comprising the interconnections of the action of an individual actor. The actor's actions are organized by a structure of need dispositions...the action of the single actor have a determinate organization of compatibilty or integration with one another.

In other words, for Mao Zedong to successfully convert the old socio-cultural values into a new socialist value, he had to mesh individual need dispositions with the demands of overall

national development achievements.

Simple acceptance of the new socalist value by the masses was a beginning. But Mao realized that for his ideology to have far reaching consequence, it had to be deeply rooted within individuals' cognitive structures. In other words, the Chinese government had to engage in a process whereby culture patterns came to "constitute part of the structure of the personality system of the actor itself...[and] the "deeper" layers of the motivation become harnessed to the fulfillment of the role expectation."[7] As Parsons sees it, "internalization of values in the personality is thus the direct counterpart of their institutionalization in the social system."[8]

Mao Zedong's use of mass communications rewarded individuals who conformed with the "mass line" and "party line" and punished individuals who were deviant. The many articles on the People's Daily and critiques read on radio broadcastings daily are concrete examples of this process. On a more interpersonal level, the discussion groups and learning sessions in different levels of the central government and local municipalities also were part of this process.

As early as 1943, Mao had alluded to the importance of establishing communication with and among the masses.[9]

> We should go to the masses and learn from them, synthesize their experience into better-articulated principles of methods, then do propaganda among the masses, and call upon them to put these principles and methods into practice

> so as to solve their problems and help them achieve liberation and happiness.

Although at that time Mao didn't spell out an explicit methodology to convert the masses, it is obvious in his mass communication policy that he and the Chinese Communist Party have placed the mass media in a central role.

However, in his attempt to cultivate a new socio-cultural value in China, Mao had occasionally drawn upon some of the pre-Revolutionary values as an anchorage point for the new value. One example of this would be the concept of "loyal to the Emperor and be patriotic to the country." Mao had converted this concept to "loyal to the Chinese Communist Party and support the party policy in the course of the proletarian revolution." The masses were told that they should obey the order of the central government and take active part in the class struggle as these were the means to show their loyalty to the government and their patriotism towards the nation. Mao's "directives," as it had turned out during the Cultural Revolution, was the "highest instruction," the moral equivalent of the ancient Emperor's decrees. The other example would be the idea of "self-purification". Ancient Chinese values preached that a "learned man" should conduct self-criticism three times a day as a step towards purification of the individual's personality and thoughts. In Mao's terms, the self-criticism campaigns were the equivalence of such purification process, but in a Marxist-Leninist-Maoist approach. By doing so, Mao had

attempted to make the new socialist value more salient to the masses.

The Parsonian Cybernetic Model

In his social system, Parsons maintained that all social systems face four problems: adaptation, goal attainment, integration and latent pattern maintenance/tension management.

Adaptation in Parsons' conception is the securing of sufficient resources from the environment and distributing them among the system. This implies the system has the ability to allocate or reallocate available resources in the process of change. The survival of the system will therefore depend on certain social structures that perform the function of adaption to the changing environment. The goal attainment function is the mobilization of system resources to attain system goals and to establish priorities among them. In other words, the system has to stimulate and activate its structures and sub-structures towards the goal set by the system itself. Integration is the need to coordinate, adjust and regulate relationships among various actors or units within the system to keep the system functioning. The last function alluded to by Parsons is the latency system maintanence/tension management function. This can be defined from two perspectives. It can be defined as the need to make certain that actors are sufficiently motivated to play their parts in the system to maintain the value pattern. It can also be defined as including the need

to provide the mechanism for internal tension management. So to speak, it is a point of convergence of both personality and culture. In this sense, the system has to provide some incentives to the actors so as to motivate them in the adaptation and goal attainment processes. Actors are not supposed to be self-activated in a social change process, and some prodding from the system is therefore needed. At the same time, conflicts are bound to be found within a system at the time of change. Such conflicts can be found within the system and between the actors as well. The existence of such conflicts is potentially dangerous to the integrity of the system.

We must also not forget that these functions are inter-dependent. The functioning of goal attainment is dependent upon the functioning of integration and adaptation and later on the management of tension and maintenance of latent patterns. At the same time, the functioning of integration will have to depend on the functioning of tension management and adaptation. All these four functions, as Parsons noted, are the pre-requisites for a social system to maintain its boundaries. That is to say, if a system (including a total society) wants to survive, it has to see that all four of its sub-systems are functioning and not only one or two of them.

Figure 1 about here

However, the pattern-maintenance function, as explained by Parsons:[10]

> Occupies a special place in that it is the focus of stability in both of the two main respects. It is internal rather than external, in the sense of being insulated from the more fluctuating process of the environment...and insulated from the continuing adjustment which the adaptative and goal-oriented processes on the part of plural units bring about in the internal subsystem.

In other words, the internalization of the new socio-cultural values by the masses is crucial to the maintenance of social stability in the process of value-generation in China. Mass communication, as identified earlier in its functions, tends to be the linkage with personality need-desposition and cultural values. This means by performing the function of conflict resolution and mass mobilization, mass communication helps to maintain the value pattern of the new socio-cultural values after the process of change. These internalized norms help to solve the problems of the social order besides motivating the masses for participating in socially valued patterns of action.

The legitimization of the new socio-cultural values is also crucial to the existence of the newly established Chinese government. In his explanation of the ultimate failure of the Roman Empire, Parsons maintained that this is a consequence of its inability "to develop a dynamic religious system which could legitimate and

strengthen the enormously expanded societal community."[11] In order for differentiation to occur, crucial problems must be solved at every level of the social system. The direction for these solutions must be provided by controlling factors on the higher levels of the cybernetic hierarchy. This would mean the Marxist-Leninist-Maoist ideology in the Chinese social context.

The legitimization of the new socialist values as compared to the traditional feudalistic values of the Duke of Chou and Confucius was comparable to the above notion of "a dynamic religious system" alluded to by Parsons in the sense that they both attempted to strengthen the evolving social environments. However, the new socialist values also challenged many of the practices of the traditional values that were deeply embedded in the various Chinese social strata. The numerous campaigns such as the Anti-three and Anti-five (1951-52), the Hundred Flowers (1956), the Rectification campaign (1958), the Cultural Revolution (1967-77), the Criticizing Confucius and Lin Piao campaign (1974), and the Anti-Water Margin campaign (1975) etc. generated in the 50's through the 70's via the mass media were aimed at planting the new socialist values in the cognition of the individuals. The numerous campaigns tried to replace the old traditional, feudalistic Chinese values with more revolutionary values that were favorable to the development of a modern China. In Mills words, "every campaign usually [began] with a series of articles and editorials in newspaper."[12] In this sense, mass

communication became the vehicle for transmitting and cultivating the new Marxism-Leninism-Maoism among the Chinese masses. The objective of these mass campaigns was to create a "mass line" which followed the "party line" in the process of social change in China. The role of mass communication in such processes of value transmission is also manifested by a commentary in the People's Daily:[13]

> Journalism is the tool for class struggle.... it is the weapon held by the working class and the masses to overthrow capitalism and establish socialism.

This notion of utilizing the press as a valid, powerful weapon in the process of value change in China is also in line with Mao's terms:[14]

> Journalism must be led by, or bound to, a particular class, and journalism supposedly free of any bonds simply do not exist. It is either bound to the proletariat or to the bourgeoise - one or the other.

Since the press [and other mass media] in China is controlled by the central government which is a vehicle of the Chinese Communist Party, it is natural to say that they are bound to the working class, or the proletariat. It is therefore the obligation of the mass media to serve the party ideology in the metamorphosis of the Chinese society in terms of value change in the form of class struggle.

According to Mao's modification of the Marxist theory, most traditional customs were regarded as the negative legacy of the

class oppression inherented in China's several thousand years of feudal landlord system. To establish socialism in China would therefore require the elimination of the social basis of these old customs and values. However, it is difficult for the lay masses to realize the "correct perspective" of the party ideology since it is so abstract and remote to them. This new party ideology also challenges many of the traditional Chinese customs. In Mao's thinking, the consciousness of the masses on the "correct perspective" is essential for the new socialist value to flourish in China and eventually replace the traditional Confucian values. The study of Mao's thoughts via the mass media and study groups are means to remould and lead the masses towards this new social culture. As observed by Chu (1979):[15]

> In every stage of the change process, in every campaign, communication has been used extensively to impress upon the Chinese people the need for a new way of life and a new set of ideologies.

Figure 2 about here

As illustrated in Figure 2, the higher-order Mao Zedong Thought endorsed by the Chinese Communist Party became part of the cultural support for the social structure in the form of Marxism-Leninism-Maoism. This new ideology was still too abstract and remote for the lay masses to fully internalize. Hence mass media, as a new social institution and an information channel,

filtered and reinterpreted the new socio-cultural values down to the level of individual actor's congitive structures. Thus, a very broad Maoist value such as "serve the people" became increasingly articulated as it "moved down" the various hierarchical levels -- until by the time it reached a specific group of medical worker in a clinic or collective farm workers on a commune, the loose mandate of "serve the people" had in such a process became specified in production quotas, attitudional requirements, etc. The bare foot doctor program and the sent down of college students to the rural villages were examples of such process. In other words, the abstract ideology of "serve the people" had been clarified and operationalized at the more tangible attitude/behavior patterns.

In this model, the components of communisn as the utopia provides the most general guidelines for national development goals. Anything that deviates from the national development goals guided by communism will be identified and commented on, frequently through the mass media. This has been done several times in China, such as the Cultural Revolution in 1967 and the more recent Anti-Gang of Four campaign in 1978.

The feedback mechanism is crucial to the entire change process because it provides a means of checking the defects or mulfunctioning of the social structure. The cybernetic activities involved in such processes reflect a self-activited mechanism within the new social structure. Any irregularities or deviance are detected swiftly,rectified, and publicized through the mass

media. By transmitting the new socio-cultural values via mass communication to the masses, the Chinese government attempts to help them internalize these new cultural values.

Discussion and Conclusion

In the past three decades, the Chinese Communist Party has attempted to replace the old conventional socio-cultural value system with a new revolutionary value system built on a Marxist-Leninist-Maoist ideology. This has been a difficult task for the communist party, and particularly, for Mao Zedong himself.

The resistance encountered in such change process was enormouse: Confucian teachings -- once referred to by Mao as the "poisonous weeds" -- were so deep rooted in every stratum of the Chinese society. The removal of this big mountain[16] in China was achieved partly through the use of mass media in the decades long social change. By creating a new socio-cultural value system and legitimizing this as the predominant cultural value system of contemporary China via mass communication, Mao attempted to spread his new cultural value throughout the vast territories of China.

In order to make the new cultural values more easily accepted by the masses, the Chinese government had to drawn occasionally upon certain aspects of the pre-revolutionary values [those that are more salient and in agreement with the new values] as the catalyst in the change process. It would be difficult, if not

impossible, for any society to wipe out its historical culture completely and re-establish a new one in its place. China is no exception. The transition from an old to a new socio-cultural value does take time, particularly when the transition is from one dominant cultural value (e.g. feudalism) to another dominant cultural value (e.g. socialism/communism). The Chinese experience can be, and may be repeated, in many Asian developing nations in their course of social change.

The cultivation of a new socialist value in any non-socialist society calls for the ingenious manipulation of mass media. The role of mass communication in the social development process as noted by Schramm (1964), Lerner (1963),Rogers(1969;1971), Chu (1977; 1979) and many other communication theorists also suggest that the ultimate acceptance of a new culture by any developing nation may depend at least in part on the effectiveness of mass communication. China is one example.

The cybernetic model suggested in this paper can also be applied to other developing nations by substituting another higher-order ideological values and tracing its increasing specification on lower and lower levels just as we have traced China's highest-order ideological values of Maoism down through increasing specification to the national development goals and ultimately down to specific goals for collective farms, work brigades, and even individuals. The assumption here is that all developing nations share some traditional values. If meaningful change is

to occur, those values must be replaced/revised/ or reinterpreted. The Parsonian cybernetic model suggests that those changes will occur in a coherent fashion, with high-level diffuse values becoming increasingly articulate and specific on lower and lower levels, until, finally, they become internalized within individual personalities at the lowest levels.

Adaptation Goal Attainment

Economy	Polity
(Mass Communication) Sub-System	Integrative Sub-System

Latency:Pattern Maintenance-Tension Management

Integration

Fig.1 Society As A Social System with Mass Communication As A Sub-System

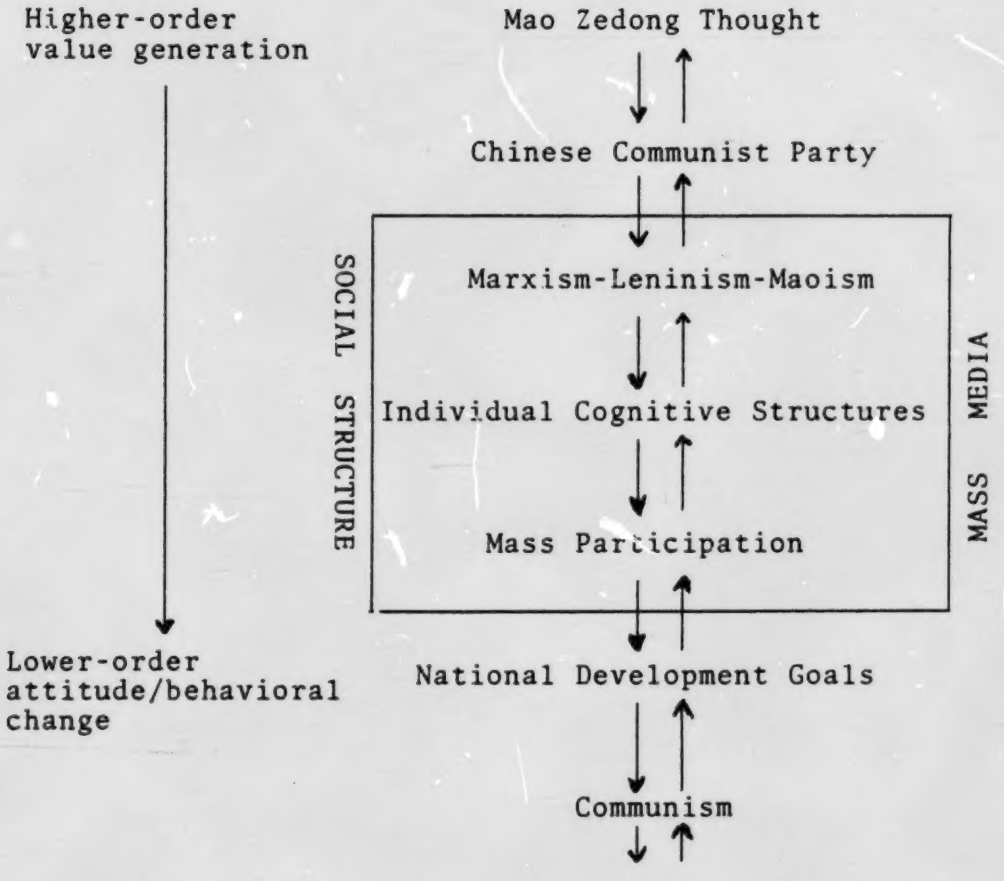

Fig.2 A Cybernetic Model for National Development of China

Footnotes

1 For a detailed discussion of Parsons' scheme on social system, please refer to his book The Social System, 1951.

2 Parsons, The Social System, p.11.

3 Ibid., p.327.

4 Inid., p.5,6.

5 Mao Zedong "On People's Democratic Dictatorship." Selected Works, vol.4, p.418.

6 Parsons, Toward a General Theory of Action, p.55.

7 Parsons, The Social System, p.42.

8 Parsons, Toward a General Theory of Action, p.240.

9 Mao Zedong, "Get Organized" Selected Works, vol.3, p.158.

10 Parsons, Social System and the Evolution of Action Theory, p.233.

11 Parsons, Society: Evolutionary and Comparative Perspectives, p.92.

12 Harriet Mills, "Thought Reform: Ideology Revolution in China." Atlantic, No.204, 1959, p.74.

13 People's Daily, September 22, 1957.

14 Peking Review, September 13, 1963, pp.18-27.

15 Godwin Chu and Francis Hsu (ed.), Moving A Mountain, p.18.

16 Mao has referred to the often told Chinese folklore "How Yu Kong Moved the Mountains" in which he implied the removal of feudalism and capitalism as two mountains that obstruct the development of China into a socialism nation.

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